

# INDUSTRIAL WORKER

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## Police arrests try to disrupt convention protests

Police harassment and repression during the Republican National Convention (RNC) held on September 1-4 in the Twin Cities, Minnesota, violated the right to assemble and protest of protesters who came to protest eight years of Republican party rule and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

An estimated 800 people were ar-

rested during the week, including 21 journalists and news gathering staff. About 10,000 people attended the main anti-war march on September 1 to coincide with the convention's opening day. During

the protests themselves, police routinely used batons, tear gas and pepper spray as well as flash-stun and concussion grenades, and rubber bullets.

Police tried to disrupt the protests by targeting their infrastructure in preemptive raids. On the night of August 29, police raided the protesters' RNC Welcoming Committee convergence space, used for meetings, communications and coordination, alleging a violation of the fire code.

Eight RNC Welcoming Committee organizers have since been charged with conspiracy to riot in order to further terrorism.

"Conspiracy to commit riot was the charge used against the Chicago 8 after the police riots in Chicago during the 1968 Democratic Convention," said Heidi Boghosian, Executive Director of the National Lawyers Guild. "Guild attorneys defended those charged in 1968 and we will do so again now."

The president and vice-president of Communities United Against Police Brutality were also detained during the raid. When they were released, they returned to their home to find that someone had broken into the vice-president's car and into their garage, and searched through

boxes of documents. Nothing of value was taken.

Early the next morning, police raided three houses, including one being used by Food Not Bombs to cook food for the protesters.

The repression extended to unrelated labor actions. On August 31, riot police blocked IWW Starbucks Workers Union barista Erik Forman and about 100 supporters, all of whom had paid for their transit tickets, from leaving the light rail station at the Mall of America. They had planned to accompany Forman back to

his first day back at work at the Mall of America.

"We were trapped inside the train for about 20 minutes. The police even prohibited a woman with a child who needed insulin from leaving the train, endangering the child's health. After about 10 minutes and only after repeatedly insisting that we had a medical emergency did the police permit the woman and child to exit the train," wrote Twin Cities IWW member Matt May. They were told that the police were blocking their exit because the mall didn't want them there.

At the Democratic Party's National Convention in Denver, Colorado, about 7,000 people marched in the August 27 anti-war march. Police arrested 154 people.

Congress had allocated \$50 million to each party's convention for security.

The RNC Welcoming Committee ([www.nornc.org](http://www.nornc.org)), the Coldsnap Legal Collective ([coldsnaplegal.org](http://coldsnaplegal.org)) and the Minnesota chapter of the National Lawyers Guild ([nlg.org](http://nlg.org)) are all taking action to support arrestees.

*With files from the Twin Cities IWW, Indypendent newspaper, and Twin Cities Indymedia.*

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Photo: Erik Davis

Protesters dressed up as politicians at the Republican National Convention in Twin Cities, Minnesota, drag Lady Liberty through the streets.

## Quebec workers get union contract at Wal-Mart

Gatineau, Québec, members of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) union became the first unionized Wal-Mart workers in North America when a government-appointed arbitrator imposed a three-year collective agreement on August 15.

The contract, which came into effect immediately, raised the average wages of the Gatineau Wal-Mart main store and Tire and Lube Express workers by 30 per cent and also improved vacation benefits.

The UFCW Canada Local 486 bargaining unit was certified in 2005, but "following almost three years of legal delays and stalled negotiations with the company," binding arbitration was imposed.

UFCW Canada National President Wayne Hanley described the contract as "fair" and "in line with similar workplaces in Québec. Wal-Mart should now act as a good Canadian corporate citizen and live up to the terms of the contract."

Union and community activists are watching the case to see what Wal-Mart will do in response.

In 2005, UFCW had unionized a Wal-Mart store in Jonquière, Québec. Wal-Mart responded by shutting down the store before a first contract could be negotiated, claiming the store was losing money. The same year, UFCW applied to the Québec labor board to represent workers at Wal-Marts in Gatineau, Saint-Hyacinthe, and Brossard.

Currently, Wal-Mart and the UFCW are in binding arbitration for a first contract at the Saint-Hyacinthe store.

To add to Wal-Mart's union troubles, in Canada, the Supreme Court of Canada agreed on August 7 to hear two appeals from workers who lost their jobs at the Jonquière store three years ago. As is customary, the Supreme Court gave no reason for deciding to hear the appeal.

The appeal is the last legal step for the former employees in a series of lost legal battles. The Québec labor tribunal dismissed the workers' complaints, save one. The Québec Court of Appeal then threw out the complaint it did allow. Wal-Mart's lawyers have argued that Canadian law allows a company to close a store for any reason it chooses.

## UK cinema fires IWW organizer

Showroom Cinema in Sheffield, England, fired IWW member Chris Lockwood on August 21 from his bar job for union organizing.

The firing is the most recent part of a campaign by management to pick off and isolate workers who have voiced objections to recent changes that have worsened the conditions of all who work at the non-profit movie house. The Showroom cinema is a registered charity

and claims to be an "investor in people", yet has consistently attacked workers pay and conditions with the sole aim of making more money.

Lockwood's firing represents a direct and illegal attack against union organising. Management have refused his request to review his dismissal.

IWW members picketed the Showroom Cinema on September 12 to demand his immediate reinstatement.



## Letters welcome!

Send your letters to: [iw@iww.org](mailto:iw@iww.org) with "Letter" in the subject.

**Mailing address:**  
IW, PO Box 52003, 298 Dalhousie St,  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1N 1S0 Canada

## October 3 deadline

Announcements for the "In November, We Remember" *Industrial Worker* deadline is October 3. Recognize a Fellow Worker or campaign! Send announcements to [iw@iww.org](mailto:iw@iww.org).

Much appreciated donations for the following sizes should be sent to IWW GHQ, PO Box 23085, Cincinnati OH 45223 USA.

\$12 for 1" tall, 1 column wide  
\$40 for 4" by 2 columns  
\$90 for a quarter page

## Industrial Worker

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## GA should focus on organizing, coordination

As a first-timer at the IWW's General Assembly (GA), I thought I'd record a few of my perceptions of the event.

It was a great experience to meet so many Wobblies from across the globe, not only from the UK, the US and Canada but also those members from the German language area and Portugal, as well as those invited guests from the French Confédération Nationale du Travail (CNT) and Courant Syndicaliste Révolutionnaire (CSR) and the Polish comrade talking about the Workers' Initiative union.

All in all, we got some serious work done over the weekend. True, we didn't all see eye-to-eye on everything but, whatever the disagreements, it was good to see members keen to move on and get on with the business of building the IWW in a spirit of friendship and solidarity.

Now for a bit of criticism... As I saw it, the bulk of the GA motions were very procedural, which can often be incredibly boring and make us seem overly bureaucratic and inward-looking. Sure,

the dull stuff has to be dealt with and GA is exactly the place to do it, but I think it would be healthier for the organisation if we also had more outward looking discussions on campaigns, organising, etc.

Moreover, it seems to me, especially as the IWW becomes increasingly global in its make up, that we are missing a golden opportunity of using this event as a means of coordination between the various IWW sections around the world.

Maybe the move to GA becoming an assembly of mandated delegates would help diversify discussions. It'll certainly ensure that branches would have the chance to send members who, for whatever reason, have so far been unable to attend GA.

It was a great couple of days, and well done to the London Wobs for putting on the first ever GA outside of North America. Best of luck to whoever hosts it next year!

Rob Blow  
Leicester GMB

## Class, Climate Change, Clean Coal Conference

The IWW Tyne and Wear and the National Union of Miners (NUM) have organized a conference on November 1 to tackle the prickly subject of "Class, Climate Change and Clean Coal" at The Bridge Hotel in Newcastle Upon Tyne, England from 11:30 AM to 5:30 PM.

The event, organized in association with the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union (RMT), Newcastle Central Branch 1901 Unite, and members of the Green movement, brings together mainstream and alternative trade unionists with conventional and radical environmental activists.

Former miner David Douglass of the IWW, environmental activists and climate change direct action advocates Rachel Whittaker and Paul Chatterton, Greenpeace activist Paul Morrison, former NUM president Arthur Scargill and current NUM President Ian Lavery and General Secretary Chris Kitchen, and Bob Crow, general secretary of the RMT are confirmed to participate. The debate will be followed by live bands at the Bridge pub.

## IWW directory



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# Ward's Supermarket fires IWW for petition

By Concerned Ward's Workers

On September 2, IWW member Joe Richard was fired from Ward's Supermarket in Gainesville, Florida. He believes, as do his co-workers, that the firing was illegal and a direct retaliation for his workplace organizing efforts.

On August 8, Joe and 14 other employees in the Natural Foods Department submitted a petition to management requesting an increased employee discount of 20 per cent (relatively common in the industry) and a regular schedule of employee performance evaluations. His petition was largely ignored

for three weeks while the owners, Billy and Trish Ward, went on vacation. After they returned, on August 25 they held one-on-one meetings with the employees who signed the petition, elaborating a new 'open door' policy by which employees could have "100 per cent access" to management if they had a concern or grievance. Beyond that, the petition was ignored.

Little over a week later, Joe was fired, ostensibly for "stealing" a bag of coffee, which is donated by Sweetwater Coffee Company explicitly for the per-

sonal use of Natural Foods Department employees. This free coffee, which was and continues to be intentionally given to employees to drink at work and take home. Employees routinely made this coffee every morning and openly took it home.

To our knowledge, no employee was ever punished nor received written warnings or been discharged for taking home this free product, which did not cost the store a single cent. Joe received no written warning, as the employee handbook stipulates is appropriate for minor infractions, but was fired two days after checking out with the coffee in hand, while buying eggs and donuts as well, on a Sunday morning.

Workers believe Joe was illegally fired for taking part in the petition drive. He vocally and outspokenly supported improving the working conditions of all the employees in the store. Identified as a 'troublemaker' by the Wards, they tried to make an example of him, contrary to the National Labor Relations Act's guarantee of the workers' right to self-organize and bargain. Ward's firing is a chilling message sent to the rest of his co-workers who still insist on bettering their conditions.

Workers are asking supporters to call the store 352-372-1741 ext. 4, and demand that they reinstate Joe or write a letter to Ward's at 515 NW 23rd Ave, Gainesville, FL, USA 32601.

## Marie Mason pleads guilty

Cincinnati, Ohio-based environmental activist Marie Mason, 46, agreed to a plea bargain on September 8 convicting her of burning the Agriculture Hall at Michigan State University on New Year's Eve 1999 as well as logging equipment in another part of Michigan the next day.

Mason was arrested on March 10 in a raid by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Her ex-husband Frank Ambrose, 33, signed a plea agreement for similar crimes on March 19 and will be sentenced on September 22.

In her plea, Mason accepted responsibility for 12 other incidents of property destruction costing nearly \$3 million attributed to the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) in Michigan and Indiana, including the burning of logging equipment, power boats, construction sites, park sites, and tree spiking. She will not be prosecuted for these incidents, according to the plea bargain.

In return for the plea bargain, the prosecution will seek a sentence of no more than 20 years imprisonment and will not appeal a sentence of 15 years. There is no condition that requires her to inform on other people in the agree-

ment. No date for sentencing has been set. She is currently under house arrest with an electric monitor to track her movements.

The Associated Press reported that Mason's lawyer, John Minock, said that Ambrose helped the FBI build its case against Mason by tape recording their conversations in 2007. They divorced in early 2008.

Aren Burthwick and Stephanie Fultz were also arrested in March 2008. Both have reportedly agreed to plead guilty to lesser charges of helping Mason and Ambrose and not reporting the arson to the authorities.

While not endorsing the ELF, the IWW's General Defense Committee (GDC) has rallied its members to raise funds for Mason's legal defense. As an IWW member, Mason petitioned the union's defense committee for support after her arrest. In July, her defense organization, the Got Your Back Collective, re-released her "Not for Profit" CD featuring Earth First! activist and guitarist Darryl Cherney to raise funds.

For updates about Mason's case and sentencing, visit [freemarie.org](http://freemarie.org).

By The Organizer, Twin Cities IWW

On July 21, Starbucks workers at the Mall of America in Twin Cities, Minnesota, United States, presented their demands to management and called on Starbucks workers from all the city's stores to "come together to bring about the big changes that can make our lives better."

We had already won the unconditional reinstatement of Erik Forman, with back wages, tips, and amendments to his work record. He did not sign a confidentiality agreement and is now back on the job, freely talking union on the job.

There are many issues in our workplace that demonstrate management's disregard for the well-being of the workers. We make a poverty wage, and don't have any guarantee of work hours from week to week. Chronic understaffing leaves us scrambling to deal with the workload put on us. With a company the

size of Starbucks, how can we as a union win our demands?

We decided to address our grievances one by one, starting with problems that can be fixed by store-level management. For years, workers at our store have been complaining about the heat level in the shop during the summer months. After several hours of cranking out Frappuccinos, baristas are drenched in sweat. The heat level is not only uncomfortable, it's unsanitary and unsafe.

This is a problem that could be remedied very easily. All management would need to do is buy us a fan. We asked them to do this repeatedly, and were told that it would be "too expensive" or that having a fan would violate health code. We got tired of their excuses, and decided to take action.

On August 4, four union baristas walked into the back room to talk with our Manager. They told him that they were giving him one last chance: either Management could buy a fan for the store, or we would. The Manager stalled. He said he wouldn't buy the fan, he was too "busy." So the workers walked off the floor, drove to Target, and bought a \$14 box fan.

We put the fan on the floor. It provided much needed relief. One of our Fellow Workers wrote "Courtesy of the IWW" on it next to a small picture of a black cat, symbol of direct action.

Our Manager was furious. He had to cover the floor while the workers went on their shopping trip. Now the ball was in Management's court. Either they could remove the fan, demonstrating once and for all their callousness and disrespect for workers, they could let it stay, in which case the union had won, or they could buy a new fan, in which case the union had won.

Two days later, our District Manager came into the store with a \$120 industrial floor fan. One week before, they had told us that \$40 was too much to spend. Direct action had changed the equation.

The fan has helped keep our workplace a little bit cooler. But now there's another problem. Our store had been loud before, and the whirring of the industrial fan makes it even louder.

Before we had a union, we would probably just have decided to slowly go deaf in silence. Now, we have a voice and we know how to use it.

**October 24**

**Don't Mourn, Organize!**

**A Tribute to U. Utah Phillips**

"The Golden Voice of the Great Southwest", Hobo, tramp, Wobbly, raconteur, and folk legend

**Anne Feeney & Friends**

Friday, October 24, 2008, 8 pm  
First Unitarian Church, Shadyside,  
Pittsburgh, PA, Contact esterhazy22@  
hotmail.com for details.

## Join the IWW Today

**T**he IWW is a union for all workers, a union dedicated to organizing on the job, in our industries and in our communities both to win better conditions today and to build a world without bosses, a world in which production and distribution are organized by workers ourselves to meet the needs of the entire population, not merely a handful of exploiters.

We are the Industrial Workers of the World because we organize industrially – that is to say, we organize all workers on the job into one union, rather than dividing workers by trade, so that we can pool our strength to fight the bosses together.

Since the IWW was founded in 1905, we have recognized the need to build a truly international union movement in order to confront the global power of the bosses and in order to strengthen workers' ability to stand in solidarity with our fellow workers no matter what part of the globe they happen to live on.

We are a union open to all workers, whether or not the IWW happens to have representation rights in your workplace. We organize the worker, not the job, recognizing that unionism is not about government certification or employer recognition but about workers coming together to address our common concerns. Sometimes this means striking or signing a contract. Sometimes it means refusing to work with an unsafe machine or following the bosses' orders so literally that nothing gets done. Sometimes it means agitating around particular issues or grievances in a specific workplace, or across an industry.

Because the IWW is a democratic, member-run union, decisions about what issues to address and what tactics to pursue are made by the workers directly involved.

**TO JOIN:** Mail this form with a check or money order for initiation and your first month's dues to: IWW, Post Office Box 23085, Cincinnati OH 45223, USA.

Initiation is the same as one month's dues. Our dues are calculated according to your income. If your monthly income is under \$1,000, dues are \$6 a month. If your monthly income is between \$1,000 - \$2,000, dues are \$12 a month. If your monthly income is over \$2,000 a month, dues are \$18 a month. Dues may vary outside of North America and in Regional Organizing Committees (Australia, British Isles, German Language Area).

I affirm that I am a worker, and that I am not an employer.

I agree to abide by the IWW constitution

I will study its principles and acquaint myself with its purposes.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

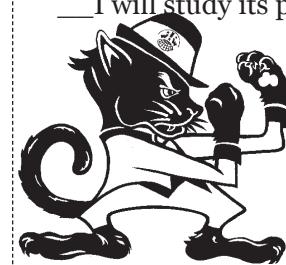
City, State, Post Code, Country: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount Enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

Membership includes a subscription to the *Industrial Worker*.



# Secret to union web site success

Ask people what they think makes for a great union website. Some will say: Keep it fresh with loads of new content. Others will add: Make it interactive. Add a mailing list. Make sure the site is accessible for disabled people. Use a content management system. Don't use Flash. Do add a search bar.

That's good advice, but in my experience setting up three websites for three different trade unions in London this summer, I think there is one thing often neglected when we talk about the difference between success and failure. I'm talking about training.

You can't just build a website and hand it over to a union. Even if it's your own union and you've built the website yourself.

I'll give an example. For one website I've just completed, first I trained the branch secretary for a couple of hours. I then trained two other branch officials because it's always best to have more than one person involved for a couple more hours. Last week I met with the branch secretary to do another hour-long refresher. This week, he came by for two more hours to work out how to do a whole bunch of things on the site. And we're not done yet. I've asked them to plan on a further training day.

The websites I've designed recently use Drupal, a powerful open source content management system. We like to say that running a website isn't rocket science and tools like Drupal make it easy for anyone to have a feature-rich website that's easy to maintain.

But that's not exactly true. Judging by the number of issues which have come up with the three unions I've been working with, when planning on a website of this type, the vast majority of your time will be spent training—not configuring files.

I have long felt that trade unionists should have full control over their websites and not be reliant upon techies to do the work for them. Maybe that's part of the reason why I find myself doing so much training. I don't want to get an email or a phone call from the union every time there's a small problem. The fewer emails and phone calls I get will depend entirely on how well I've trained the union.

Often the documentation for the tools we use is written by people who don't remotely resemble the actual users. Fresh-faced university graduates in Silicon Valley may be the ones who write up the documentation, but when ordinary mortals read it, they often don't get it.

That's why to properly train trade unionists to use a newly-created website, you have to know them—and it is best to be one of them. There are a whole range of reasons why people have a hard time with technology, so we have to start out with a certain degree of empathy.

The other day I was training a group of low-paid service sector workers in London to use their brand new union site. The subject was 'how to create an account on the site'. To the 25-year old techie in San Francisco writing the code and what passes for documentation, that's not even worth discussing. You obviously just click on the 'create an account' link, a no-brainer.

I spent probably 20 minutes with the group just on this subject. And it's not because these people were particularly slow.



We can't forget that even though most people we work with are now online, that doesn't mean that they're proficient in using complex websites. Mostly, people use email, surf the web, maybe they buy stuff.

Most trade union members have never created an account for themselves on a Drupal site, even though techies seem to think that is the easiest thing in the world.

We also need to keep in mind that many of the workers we are dealing with are not working in their native languages. So the on-screen instructions and error messages will not neces-

sarily be clear to them.

So when you show someone a screen and it asks them for their user name, you hit the first hurdle. Does it want their real name? Their full name? A nick-name? What if the name is already taken? And where does it ask for their password? (Answer: it doesn't.)

I find out just how hard it can be to use what we might think of as a simple website by actually sitting down with working people and training them, answering their questions, and seeing what is difficult.

The guru of website usability, Jakob Nielsen, calls this kind of testing of websites absolutely essential. But I'm certain that most unions don't test and don't train properly. Big unions will use large and expensive design firms and training will be minimal. Techies will handle any problems that arise.

Local unions will have websites designed by an enthusiast and he or she will be the only one who actually knows how to use Dreamweaver or FrontPage or whatever tool they used to create it.

Training makes the difference between a stale and boring union website and a great one, between a website that's just an online brochure and one that's an online community.

It's not enough to use the latest, coolest tools nor is it enough to rely on buzzwords like "open source" and "content management system."

If I've learned one thing in a decade of designing union websites it's this: the most important skill is the ability to listen.

## Martyred Sacco & Vanzetti are honored in Boston

On August 21, Boston city council passed a motion to make August 23, 2008, Sacco and Vanzetti Commemoration Day. It was the 81st anniversary of the two anarchists' execution.

Ferdinando Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were wrongly convicted and later executed on August 23, 1927, for the murder of a guard and paymaster of a shoe factory. The conviction was in part due to discriminatory attitudes against Italian immigrants and two outspoken community dissidents.

Boston city councillor Chuck Turner put forward the resolution honoring the two anarchists. Turner attended the commemoration event and spoke. Other speakers included Pasqualino Colombaro, Dorotea Manuela, and Molly Adelstein.

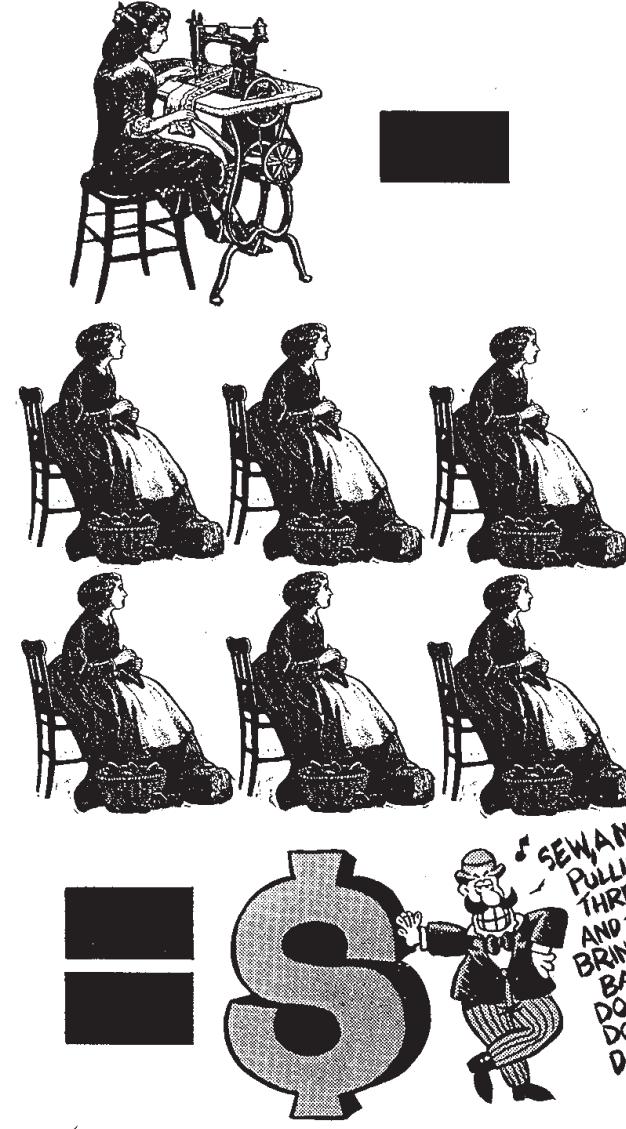
See [www.saccoandvanzetti.org](http://www.saccoandvanzetti.org).



### CHAPTER 17 THE COMING OF THE SEWING MACHINE

THE INTRODUCTION OF THE SEWING MACHINE IN 1846 (AND THE FOOT TREADLE IN 1851) ADDED TO THE BURDEN OF WOMEN WHO WORKED FOR WAGES, WHILE ADDING MILLIONS TO THE PROFITS OF THE MEN WHO EMPLOYED THEM. WITH A SEWING MACHINE, ONE WOMEN COULD DO THE WORK OF SIX SEWING 20 HOURS A DAY.

IN 1850, NEARLY TWO-THIRDS OF THE 96,000 WORKERS IN GARMENT FACTORIES WERE WOMEN. BUT FOR YEARS AHEAD, MOST WOMEN GARMENT WORKERS WORKED AT HOME. BOSSSES FOUND THE HOME WORK SYSTEM CHEAPER; AFTER ALL, THE WOMEN HAD TO BUY THEIR OWN NEEDLE AND THREAD, AND RENT OR BUY THEIR SEWING MACHINES.



MANUFACTURERS WERE CONSTANTLY IN DEBT TO THE BOSS FOR SUPPLIES AND THE COST OF THE SEWING MACHINES. THE EARLIEST SEWING MACHINES WERE HARD TO CONTROL AND FREQUENTLY TORE THE FABRIC; THE SEWERS WOULD BE CHARGED BY THE CONTRACTORS FOR DAMAGE. COMPETITION KEPT PIECE RATES LOW; WOMEN HAD TO WORK LONG HOURS AT THEIR SEWING MACHINES.

THE SEWING MACHINE RADICALLY CHANGED THE SHOE AND BOOT INDUSTRY. UNLIKE THE GARMENT INDUSTRY, THE SEWING MACHINE BROUGHT WOMEN WORKERS OUT OF THE HOME AND INTO FACTORIES. THE SEWING MACHINE AND MCKAY MACHINE FOR SEWING UPPERS TO SOLES WERE 1850'S HIGH TECH THAT INCREASED PROFITS AND WORKER PRODUCTIVITY—but NOT WORKERS' WAGES.

## One million signatures sought for Employee Free Choice Act

By [www.unionvoice.org](http://www.unionvoice.org)

Union advocacy organization Jobs with Justice is trying to collect one million signatures supporting the Employee Free Choice Act being considered in the US Congress and Senate.

Jobs with Justice claims that the legislation, if passed, would "strengthen the middle class" by making it easier for workers to join unions. The petition will be delivered to the new US president and Congress.

"It's no coincidence that as union membership has declined, the gap between rich and poor has widened. Workers in unions earn 28 per cent higher wages, and are 62 per cent more likely to

have employer-covered health coverage, and they are 386 per cent more likely to have guaranteed pensions," said the email appeal. "Allowing more workers to freely join unions and bargain with their employers will help rebuild the middle class by expanding health care, improving retirement security, and raising the standard of living for all working families." With unions, American workers would be better equipped to cope with an economy where "quality employment opportunities and paychecks are shrinking, the cost of fuel and health care continue to skyrocket, and working families are struggling to make ends meet."

# Youth must organize at school and work to win power

By Rhiannon Edwards, Wobbly Dispatch

It may come as a surprise to many that the *de facto* minimum working age in Alberta, Canada, is 12 years old. Not 16, not even 14, but 12.

A few years ago, the provincial government removed the process for monitoring young workers: while the same restrictions still exist on paper—for example, restrictions on hours (no late school nights) and types of work (no deep fryers)—there is now no way for the government to keep track of how many kids are working, where they're at, and whether or not their special rights are being respected. In short, in Alberta there is no specific mechanism for enforcing the laws surrounding child labor. Twelve-year-olds are kids; the government may as well have told businesses that child labour is A-OK in this province.

This particular legislative shift reflects a larger trend that now sees youth and student workers becoming a particularly exploited and marginalized portion of the work force. Developments in other places, such as the implementation of the "first job/entry level wage rate" in neighboring province British Columbia which enables businesses to pay primarily young workers \$2 less an hour for the first few months, are other examples of this same trend.

When young workers do attempt to enter the workforce full time, they are often kept underemployed in low skill, low wage, so-called "flexibilized" jobs that give them just enough wages to get by but then deny them any job security or benefits. Furthermore, it goes without saying that union membership is

entirely unfamiliar to the vast majority of young workers. The same governments that legitimize oppressive working environments for the young also actively promote the idea that unions today are unnecessary and unimportant; minimizing the potential power held by a conscious workforce. As a result of this propaganda, the vast majority of young workers remain unfamiliar with the idea of solidarity and the effectiveness of organizing in unions.

So, if we as young workers are so significantly alienated in our workplaces, where are the spaces where young workers can come together, represent themselves, and fight for better conditions in their lives? The other places we spend most of our time is in our schools; from elementary to high school, to trade schools, universities and colleges. These are also incredibly alienating spaces where students are taught to respect authority and to hold in awe the very system that exploits them.

One result of this alienation is that the organizations that purportedly exist to represent students' interests—the various forms of students' unions or councils from high school onward—are generally reduced to a mockery of a "by students for students" democracy. Instead of being organizations that concern themselves with the issues that really affect students' daily lives, such as asserting more influence over curriculum development, staffing, school finances, etc., the elected student leaders take on planning school dances, scheduling graduation photos, renting lockers, running bars, cafes and beer gardens,

and providing microwaves.

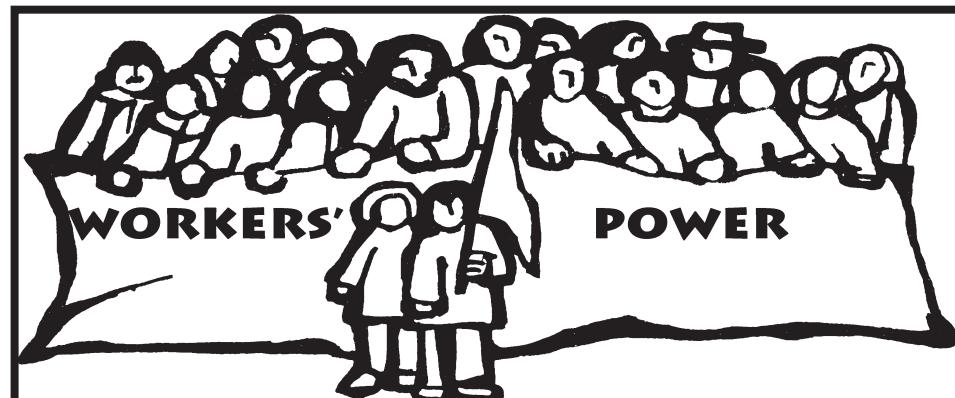
This is not to say that dances and microwaves aren't important nor that existing student associations are entirely lost causes. Rather I mean to point out that the overwhelming role of most student associations is to provide a distraction for students, who might otherwise see great problems in the relations of power and control within their schools, and the social systems of which they are a part.

What is the alternative then? Well, we could start by fighting for, and building autonomous, independent student associations. The president of the University of Alberta Students' Union serves at the "behest" of the premier; this is a limitation that must go. At the University of Buenos Aires in Argentina, by contrast, elected students from each faculty sit on the primary governing body of the University and have a say in all the important decisions that are made, including financial matters. When these student representatives aren't listened to, students often go on strike, running

alternative classes with sympathetic professors, sometimes in the street, until their demands are met.

To build true, effective democratic students' associations, that are distinct from the popularity contests that student body elections are today, the elected students will have to turn their attention to matters which bolster student power and are of real importance in students' daily lives. Why shouldn't students have a say in who gets hired as the next Chemistry teacher, how much money is allocated to sports or music programs, or how fair a particular teacher's discipline is, just to name a few?

Finally, students should stop organizing strictly as students. Except for the heirs of the propertied few, we all have to enter the workforce at one point or another. We're workers too, and members of working class communities. Until we recognize this fact, and build students' organizations that are concerned with our well-being outside of school, we will collectively remain irrelevant.



## Forget Industrial Power

By Nate Holdren

The old wobbly song "There Is Power In A Union" goes: "There is power, there is power in a band of working folks, When they stand, hand in hand." This is the basic idea of a union, strength in numbers. We're lacking in the numbers department in the IWW today. So our power is small, at least in one important sense. We need to recognize this if we're going to grow quickly and efficiently, without cutting any corners in terms of member education and development.

Some people in the IWW think we should organize big companies that dictate conditions for the rest of their industry because they have such a large share of the market. If we make changes at the top of the industry or at market leaders then we make change across the whole industry. That's true, and we should organize these companies (we should organize everywhere). But the reality is that our power is small compared to big companies.

More than that, our first priority right now should not be to make change for as many workers as possible across an industry.

Our first priority right now should be to have members improve their own lives at work and to recruit other organizers out of our co-workers. That will build our pool of committed, capable organizers so that we can eventually make a really enormous impact for our whole class. On the short term, we should focus

on small companies instead of big ones. We are tiny compared to a multinational company and so is our relative power. However, compared to a small "mom-and-pop" grocery store or a locally owned restaurant with 20 employees or a fast food franchise where the owner has 5 stores and 75 employees, we are huge.

We have branches that are bigger than companies of that size. We can run picket lines and other actions against those companies which can hurt them economically (as opposed to picketing, say, Wal-Mart) because every shop is a huge portion of the company's total income. This will maximize the relative power of our branches and make for more winnable campaigns in a shorter time frame. Those wins will result in more members with greater organizing experience and higher morale. It might also reduce organizer burnout by giving us more victories to restore our spirits in the short term.

Of course, gains in smaller companies will be limited by the conditions in the industry which are mostly set by industry leaders. We'll have to explain this to the workers we organize and turn them into organizers dedicated to organizing their whole industry. The small shops will provide us with a larger base and more concrete examples to work from as we turn to organizing larger companies in those industries.



## Toronto campus radio fires news director as it bargains

By Mick Black

Toronto community radio station CKLN 88.1 FM management fired its news director, Kristin Schwartz, on August 11, in the midst of union negotiations between the board of directors and CKLN staff who are members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) local 1281. The firing came scant days before a strike vote was to be held.

Schwartz started to work as a volunteer at CKLN in 1996 and has been the full-time staff News Director of CKLN since 2000.

The firing is the latest assault on the progressive and inclusive working class politics of CKLN. The Board has also gutted the radio station of over 30 long-time community volunteer programmers since Spring 2008.

In addition to regular news coverage, Schwartz coordinated special programming around International Womens' Day, Pride, and Prisoner Justice Day. Schwartz also played a key role in the formation of Ground Wire, a national news program currently aired monthly across Canada. She is also a frequent contributor to Free Speech Radio News in the United States.

"For myself, the reason I supported the [union] drive was that the workplace was a place where the relations between the board and the staff were really open to arbitrary uses of power. We didn't have contracts, a lot of us didn't have job descriptions, and there was no agreed-on grievance, evaluation, or disciplinary procedure for staff. After several years of encouraging the board to come up with that I was open to a union providing that

structure," Schwartz told the *Industrial Worker*.

"Ever since these board members were elected, they've interfered in the work that was part of my job description in ways that were unprecedented in the time that I've been there, without any coherent reason that I could see."

The firing came as a "complete surprise," said Schwartz.

"I don't know what resulted in my dismissal, literally I was told that 'The board and I don't see eye-to-eye'. There was no process leading up to it."

Shortly after the dismissal, a strike vote was held by CKLN staff resulting in a one hundred per cent strike mandate. CUPE is currently in conciliation with the board trying to reach a first contract as well as fighting Schwartz's firing.

Asked what the fundamental issues at stake were, Schwartz responded: "Giving opportunities for poor and working people, people marginalized by racism, sexism, homophobia, etc., to have a voice and be able to broadcast their experiences on the FM dial is a vital service. If people want that to continue then they need to speak up for it, support me, and get involved with what's happening at CKLN."

The IWW has responded to this call for solidarity.

"It is outrageous that you would choose to fire Kirstin during contract negotiations. Such behavior on your part constitutes union-busting," said a letter to the board from Toronto IWW branch secretary Paul Bocking. Letters of support have also come in from the Canadian Auto Workers and listeners.

# UK inquiry reveals chronic neglect led to death

By Mike, IWW Edinburgh

A Fatal Accident Inquiry in Glasgow, Scotland, heard testimony from a health and safety inspector that the lorry that killed temporary agency driver, Graham Meldrum, "should not have been on the road."

Dr. Meldrum, a chemist by trade who was working as an agency driver, was killed in an accident on July 12, 2005. His widow, Karen Thomson, along with their two children, family and friends founded the Graham Meldrum Memorial Campaign which has campaigned for three years, resulting in the prosecution of the companies involved and the ongoing fatal accident inquiry.

The main health and safety inspector attending the scene told Glasgow Sheriff Court that the lorry tail-lift that killed Meldrum at Allied Bakeries' Glasgow depot was not operational.

"The lorry should not have been on the road," he said. The inspector testified that there was long-standing corrosion in the lorry's tail-lift and that there were missing pins, brackets, and springs. Little or no maintenance had been carried out. Meldrum was killed when crushed by this faulty tail-lift.

The testimony came in the fourth week of the hearing and added to other evidence of corporate disregard for workers' safety. Zurich Insurance inspected the vehicles but ignored these obvious safety faults. Ryder had the responsibility for repairing the vehicles, but only carried out the repairs they were ordered to do, ignoring most of the blatant faults.

Graham was employed as a contract driver by the temporary employment agency, Suzyline. Suzyline boss Val Brown testified at the inquiry on June 17 that he had no knowledge of any employers' legal health and safety responsibilities nor did he know about the safety laws governing driving and lifting nor did he know anything of employers' legal obligations under Section 2 of the Health and Safety Work Act 1974, which applies to everyone with a contract of employment. Brown dissolved Suzyline several months after Meldrum's death—and then started another agency, Staff Depot, based in Uddingston, near Glasgow, doing the same work.

"If this Fatal Accident Inquiry had been prior to the prosecution, then the array of charges would have been much more and the likes of Mr Keith Thomson (Allied Bakeries manager) would face individual criminal charges," Karen Thomson, Graham's partner, told the Industrial Worker. "Graham's death was to do with casualisation, with the use of Agency drivers," she said. "Every bit of evidence at the Fatal Accident Inquiry comes down to time and money, the employers wanting to save time and money."

Both ABF Grains (formerly Allied Bakeries) and TNT Logistics UK were found guilty of safety breaches in connection with Dr. Meldrum's death. However, they were ordered to pay only

small fines of £19,500 (US\$35,000) and £14,000 (US\$25,000), respectively. Graham's employer, Suzyline agency, was not prosecuted.

The companies involved are now starting to blame each other for Dr. Meldrum's death, said Thomson who is attending the hearings.

"We are starting to see the unholy alliances disintegrate, the in-fighting, the swipes, the lawyers constantly conferring with their clients, the desperate scramble for damage limitation," she said.

"We have had the lawyer for TNT insinuate that Graham's now accepted lack of training wouldn't have made any difference to his death 'cause it was the ABF Grains vehicles and they were not maintained. We have had ABF Grains saying that the missing parts, the corrosion, etc., was bypassed and the drivers making do was actually better for them, because it was less work. Both these major companies keep finding bits of evidence at the last moment. This isn't about truth, justice or lessons to be learnt, this is about who pays what."

Thomson herself testified at the inquiry as Meldrum's parents, David and Lisa Meldrum, looked on, constantly at court.

"I gave evidence and reminded them all that we are talking about a man. That had got lost a bit," said Thomson. "I also spoke of him working for a workers co-op, Greencity, for 16 years as opposed to using his PhD in chemistry because he couldn't accept the lack of morals of big business and their refusal to take any responsibility for their actions against individuals, communities, and the Earth. I felt shattered afterwards, but this was my justice."

"I am convinced that my beautiful Graham was murdered for profit, he wasn't the first and he won't be the last. My fight goes on."

## Campaign continues

The Graham Meldrum Memorial Campaign ([www.myspace.com/gmmemorialcampaign](http://www.myspace.com/gmmemorialcampaign)) sees their fight as part of a larger struggle to protect workers from injury and death on the job.

"Undoubtedly what we are doing is something we will have to discuss further. We won prosecution, we won a fatal accident inquiry, a small band of people with love on their side can change things but what of justice?"

"We have effectively taken on global giants ABF Grains (Allied Bakeries), Primark, Pataks, Twinings, British Sugar, etc., TNT and at the same time highlighted the biased unjust machine we call prosecution services."

"The public enquiry into the Stockline Disaster in Glasgow is currently underway and the 20th Anniversary of the Piper Alpha Disaster where oil giants got away with mass murder. So the killing of workers with no repercussion, except for the families, isn't new. It's awards for enterprise for them, and grief, loss, poverty and the whole weight of the law for us."



Photo: Graham Meldrum Memorial Campaign

**Karen Thomson, widowed partner to industrial accident victim Graham Meldrum, marches with family members, friends and supporters to the site of the crime at Allied Bakeries in Glasgow. He was a temporary agency driver.**

"In the face of this we have rediscovered each other, our courage, our spirits, our love for Graham and our love for justice... real justice not just monetary justice."

## Faults ignored

The tail-lift, lifting platforms on the lorries concerned, were especially constructed for Allied Bakeries, so that enor-

mous amounts of bread could be loaded and unloaded in one operation, saving the company time and money. The platforms, capable of holding up to 2.5 tonnes (5,600 pounds), were described at the Inquiry as "heavy and unpredictable." Allied Bakeries failed to build sufficient loading bays at their depot, which would have allowed a safer working system than one that relied on the tail-lifts.

The inquiry heard that Allied Bakeries cut corners on health and safety to prevent lorries going off the road to be repaired. They scrapped a maintenance contract because it was too expensive and only carried out running repairs, often ignoring defects altogether. They introduced a policy of not repairing the automatic mechanism on the tail-lift, so that it had to be operated manually.

Allied Bakeries maintenance manager Keith Thomson told the inquiry that there were six defects found on the lorry being operated by Meldrum the day before the fatal incident. He told the inquiry that there were no checks to ensure that repairs were carried out.



Photo: Graham Meldrum Memorial Campaign

**Graham Meldrum, right, and his brother Karl at a biker rally.**

Driver John Kane testified that he had reported a series of defects on the tail-lift mechanism which killed Meldrum: no internal button for the tail-lift to go up, the tail-lift was sticking on the near side, and the bracket and locking pin of the tail-lift were missing. Faults in the tail-lift mechanism had been detected on that lorry at three separate checks in the months preceding Meldrum's death.

The inquiry will resume for its seventh week on September 15. Thomson asked for people to "come to court with us, an hour here or there, a chance for your good heart and shiny face to counteract the dark and powerful suits. You will never know how important it is to see good faces in that court where nightmares come true."

Visit [www.myspace.com/gmmemorialcampaign](http://www.myspace.com/gmmemorialcampaign) for updates. For more information about workplace injuries and deaths in the UK, visit the Hazards Campaign [www.hazardscampaign.org.uk](http://www.hazardscampaign.org.uk), the Simon Jones Memorial Campaign [www.simonjones.org.uk](http://www.simonjones.org.uk), and Families Against Corporate Killers.

## On Losing Graham

"The way I feel now in some ways is still grateful, grateful for who Graham was, his principles, his humour, his love for this our Earth and all her inhabitants, his love for me and the girls and I'm still grateful that we are who we are and not them. I wouldn't want to be as inhumane as cold and calculating, to be only concerned with economics, the pursuit of profit and to fuck with any consequences. We all have to look in the mirror and one day the mirror will show it all."

"Yet again, I feel that this is in their world, their idea of justice and I don't want any part of it. As long as we are seen as their property, as long as they change things, make up things etc to suit their pocket then we will die and be maimed. Whatever I say here whatever I think, it is nothing to the very very sore personal loss my children and I feel but we also accept that we were once very lucky."

**—Karen Thomson, partner to Graham Meldrum and mother of their two daughters**

# General Assembly in Europe an IWW first

The Industrial Workers of the World held its first General Assembly outside of North America in London, England on August 30-September 1, 2008.

Hosted by the IWW British Isles Regional Organizing Committee (BIROC), 89 confirmed delegates from Canada, England, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Scotland and the United States met to discuss proposals, hear officer and organizing reports, and make international officer nominations for the November referendum.

Observers from the French Confédération Nationale du Travail (CNT) and Courant Syndicaliste Révolutionnaire (CSR), Workers' Initiative of Poland, and Solidarity Federation of the United Kingdom also attended.

General Secretary-Treasurer Mark Damron began the meeting with "excellent table-thumping singalong," as one wobbly described it, and on the last day it concluded with the traditional chorus of "Solidarity Forever".

The meeting was co-chaired by the treasurer of the British Islands Regional Organizing Committee (BIROC), Frank Syratt, and Sarah Bender of the United States. Ant Ince, Stuart Melvin, Nick Durie, and Louise van der Hoeven took minutes.

Notably, a new Assembly committee to address the critical issue of gender in the union was formed, with Rhiannon Edwards of Canada elected as chair.

Delegates made reports on their local and regional activities. IWW Regional Organizing Committees (ROCs) reported

making progress in building the IWW outside of North America. In addition to the BIROC, which has about 500 members, delegates reported organizing in the Netherlands and Portugal that may lead to new ROCs. Delegates from the Frankfurt and Cologne branches of the IWW German Language Area Regional Organizing Committee (GLAMROC) reported that this new body had 45 members and was growing.

In the United Kingdom, a number of BIROC branch members are involved in the National Shop Stewards Network ([www.shopstewards.net](http://www.shopstewards.net)), which is slated to be a rank-and-file cross-union means of rebuilding the grassroots of working class solidarity and unity in the United Kingdom. The network's first conference was backed by the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union (RMT).

The West Midlands branch in England reported that it has organized a print shop and is agitating in the health sector with the National Blood System campaign, alongside the London and Leeds branches.

The Clydeside IWW of Glasgow, Scotland, reported that it has an education job branch at Glasgow University. The Edinburgh IWW reported that it has formed an education industrial organizing committee. It has also focused on doing outreach to Polish workers who are eligible to work in the UK, but are unfamiliar with their British labor rights.

From the United States, the Chicago IWW reported that the Chicago Couriers Union was holding a conference on the same weekend. The Philadelphia IWW also reported organizing with couriers. The Olympia IWW delegate said it has an organizing drive with bike mechanics.

The New York IWW branch reported that 20 more workers have been fired for participating in the Industrial Union 460 food warehouse campaign. Meanwhile, the Providence IWW delegate announced a \$15,000 fundraising campaign to pay for the legal expenses of Alexandra Svoboda, who in August 2007 was badly injured by police during a solidarity march with New York's food warehouse workers.

## Solidarity

An emergency motion to support the Workers' Initiative union in Poland "to defend both victimised workers sacked recently in several industries for organizing" passed. The BIROC and the Polish union signed a Solidarity Alliance last year that



Photo: Carlos Guarita

**General Assembly co-chair and Starbucks Workers' Union organizer Sarah Bender facilitates the discussion at the London meeting.**

committed to card recognition between the unions, mutual aid, exchanges, and closer ties.

The Assembly also endorsed a statement to support the world's migrants who are under attack in North America and Europe. The statement denounced the "detention and deportation or removal of foreign nationals for purposes of immigration control, whether they are asylum seekers, migrant workers (documented or undocumented), or any other category of immigrant, is a breach of basic human rights and class solidarity."

"[IWW] members should therefore refuse to participate in detention, deportation or removal processes. Members are also encouraged to support action in solidarity with immigrant workers and asylum seekers (such as supporting the right to work whilst claiming asylum)."

## Proposals

Assembly delegates faced a packed agenda of 11 proposals for consideration.

The much-debated proposal to change the General Assembly into a Delegate Convention was amended and sent to referendum, with two-thirds of the votes and proxy ballots in favour. If approved by the members, this proposal would allow the Delegate Convention to make union policy, if it is sustained by a referendum vote. Currently, the General Assembly cannot make policy decisions;

it can only endorse a proposal and send it to referendum. The convention would be made up of elected delegates elected by each chartered branch. Individual members who attended the convention would be able to speak but not vote on motions. Currently, any IWW member in good standing who has the means to attend Assembly has vote and voice.

The International Solidarity Commission proposal for branches to elect a liaison person "to build greater collaboration between the ISC and the general membership of the union" passed.

The charges reform proposal to clarify jurisdiction and procedure for the IWW's internal disciplinary process was amended and passed. A proposal to introduce a conflict mediation procedure that branches could use to deal with internal conflict, rather than rely on charges, also will be on the ballot. In the 2007 referendum, two competing charges reform proposals both failed to get the two-thirds of votes cast necessary to amend the constitution.

## Nominations

As of the *Industrial Worker*'s press date, the complete list of confirmed nominees is not available. All positions have one-year terms, save the post of the Industrial Worker editor, which is a two-year job. Members should check their General Organizing Bulletin for details.



Photo: Carlos Guarita

**Adam Lincoln, Secretary of the IWW British Isles Regional Organizing Committee.**



Photo: Carlos Guarita

**An IWW member knits while listening to Assembly discussion and debate.**



Photo: Carlos Guarita

**Delegates sing "Solidarity Forever" to end the General Assembly meeting.**

## Review

# Dave Douglass honest, funny, revolutionary

*Dave Douglass, Geordies—Wa Mental, ChristieBooks, Hastings, September 2008, 352 pages, paperback, £9.95.*

Review by P.F.

*Geordies—Wa Mental* is the first volume in the autobiographical trilogy (*Stardust and Coaldust*) of David John Douglass, a coal miner for 40 years in northeastern England along the River Tyne. He tells the fascinating story of the radicalisation of a working-class Geordie (northeasterner) 'baby-boomer' during the first 20 years of his life and provides a unique and valuable insight into the political and cultural movements of the Sixties.

A great American author once advised anyone wanting to become a real writer to tell the truth until it hurts, and then to go on telling it. David Douglass' autobiography is far and away the most honest piece of writing I have read for many a long year. Whether or not it hurt him to write it, it certainly hurts to read it as page after page is so hilarious that, personally, I laughed 'til I gasped for breath. I'm not even a Geordie, but rather the sort of hard to impress Yorkshireman who will gloomily say of a comedian: 'Aye, he's all right, I suppose, if you like laughing.'

Not that Douglass sets out to be a comedian. Far from it. His book has a serious purpose.

He dips his pen in vitriol as he describes his childhood in a damp pit cottage and the dimly barren schooling that turned him into a rebel at an early age. What else could a highly intelligent boy become, relegated to the despised 'C' stream of the British education system, being told by cane-wielding teachers that he was 'cocky'.

Pursuing his interests, he read books borrowed from the adult library. Soon the young rebel became a revolutionary, trying for size a succession of movements that sought, with varying degrees of realism, to overthrow the system. As a teenager he seems to have taken part in every sort of street battle that the Sixties offered him and those of like

mind, culminating in the great 1968 Battle of Grosvenor Square. He gives the best available description from inside of the 'love' movement of the 1960s, that 'raggy-arsed working class hippyism'.

But some of the most effective writing in the book tells graphically of his demanding stint "in the cauldron of hell", down pits in Durham and Yorkshire.

Douglass was, and remains, a working-class fighter, fiercely proud of his northeastern roots, fiercely loyal to his friends and his class.

He is also a born story teller, whose characters come urgently to life on the page. Without doubt, his brave and gripping account of his early life is destined to become a classic.

## Column

### Working Family

By X348328

Getting laid off is a hard situation and it is worse still when you have a family and you're the only one working.

I work in the non-profit sector, which is notorious for short-term funding, relentless insecurity and a constant scramble for funds to finance the work dreamed up in strategic plans by senior staff and volunteer boards. While people glow about the good works achieved, the reality is that the non-profit sector demands more of its workers than it gives back.

When I started the job, back in April, the people who hired me told me that a new three-year contract with a government agency was nearly complete. Well, that wasn't exactly true. The proposal for a new contract was submitted in April, so the chances that a new contract would emerge from the government paper mill before the end of the organization's contract in June was a long shot, at best.

It's an odd couple "partnership" of industries. If the non-profit sector is characterized as relatively flat in terms of corporate culture, its primary funder, government, is stratospheric. It seems that if a proposal doesn't have the vice-president's dog's footprint on it, a proposal like ours would just be sent back

to the bottom of the hierarchy. It's only a small exaggeration.

The non-profit I joined has a long history of financial crisis, but I took the job because it was for only one year. My plan was to earn some money, set aside some of it for a house downpayment and hand back the job to my co-worker when she returned from maternity leave. That plan was broken to pieces when the layoff warning came in July and the layoff notices came in August. We all saw the numbers and there was no option, no scope for a solidarity fight.

I've been back to work for a visit and to check in about the 'Case of the Missing Contract.' The one program person whose work wasn't funded by the government gave me a big hug. "This is so strange," she said, a bit of survivor's guilt in her eyes.

I want my job back the most when I return home. It's hard to accept that, through no fault of my own save taking the damn job in the first place, I'm not a survivor.

Just thinking about it makes my skin crawl. All I want to do is apply for every comparable job, although most of those jobs are still in the non-profit sector. My family is not in dire straits, but we're not

safe either. My wife is getting maternity pay, although this, too, has been delayed. We're waiting for the direct deposit to kick in, hopefully, this month.

To make it worse, my application for employment insurance, which would have paid part of my earnings and given us some relief, was rejected. I was 27 hours of work short of qualifying. Put yourself in my wife's shoes when you hear this news.

For my wife, who grew up in a working class home in Central America, the situation raises all sorts of fears based on the experience of growing up in a struggling household. How can it be that her professionally-trained and educated husband is out of work? That wasn't part of the plan. Having an insecure income was awful when she was growing up. She doesn't want our daughters to be exposed to the same situation.

Just like in an organizing drive, I can't ignore her fear. Talking through this fear is necessary to set her mind at ease, but it is exhausting. I find it hard not to begin to question, to doubt, to ask whether I do have a chance at getting

another job. The cheerless economic headlines and ongoing election certainly does little to reinforce my optimism.

Yet, I am optimistic. I am using the time off to explore other ways of making a living that doesn't involve going into an office and being at someone's beck-and-call. Maybe it will turn into a part-time job that I can work around taking care of my daughters. Maybe something good will come out of being laid off.

Maybe, I'll get my job back sooner than later.

### My Father was a Chimney Sweeper

By Hans Marchetto, IU 330, Switzerland  
Translated from German by Gabriel Kuhn.

my father was a chimney sweeper

in the morning, just after getting out of bed,  
he spat black mucus  
then he smoked the first *gauloise* out of  
the two packages he smoked every day

and he was proud of it

his collar was always black  
from the smut entering the pores  
no matter how much he scrubbed  
under the shower at night  
it stuck like a second skin

the stools were pushed aside  
in the bars in which he drank  
he belonged to the old-fashioned fellows  
who drink while they stand

when i was a little boy he left early  
every day at about five  
at night he would return at eight  
or he wouldn't  
then my mother would send me out  
to look for him in the bars  
and bring him home

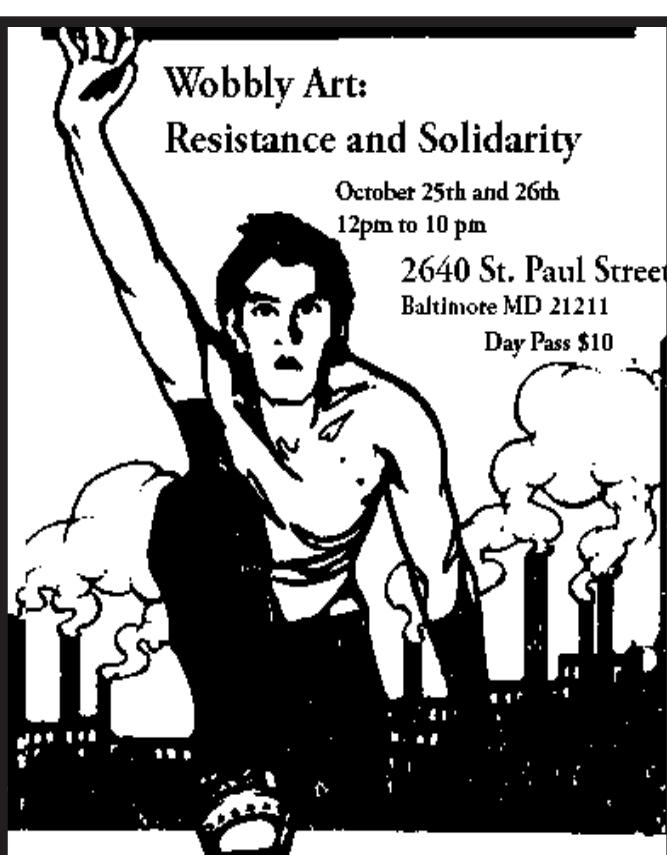
a long tour for a boy like me  
the damned neighborhood  
had many bars  
fortunately, my dad was known  
colorful like a black dog  
this helped

my father joined the union when he was sixteen  
when he was sixty-five he left  
with a voucher in his hand  
worth 300 francs

they did not want to give it to him at first  
the usual reward for the old ones was a hotel in ticino  
which they said was cheaper  
but my old man had a punctured lung  
due to an accident at work  
he had a hard time breathing

he lived another two years  
and was burned to ashes when he was sixty-seven  
i buried his urn in the ground

quite some time has passed  
since all this happened  
i think it is fortunate that i did not become  
a working class hero



The Baltimore Branch of the Industrial Workers of the World is happy to present a weekend of "Wobbly Art: Resistance and Solidarity." Examining the early history of the One Big Union, the show displays original posters and prints that mark an era of struggle and victory. Locked within each print is the Union's belief in justice, diversity, cooperative economics, and worker's rights. While "Wobbly Art: Resistance and Solidarity" focuses on fellow workers from past generations, it also reflects the current need to promote equality and create a world where all workers control the means of production. So join us the weekend of Oct. 25-26th at 2640 for a weekend of radical art, history, and lively conversation.

"An injury to one is an injury to all."

For more information please contact Koala at (240) 393 - 2955

### anti-war poem

By aztatl

all good faith-based troopers,  
telephone line snoopers  
and poopers, outside interlopers,  
invest! your sons & daughters  
into the dark energy of consumption  
so named the intelligent design  
creationist myth the Earth Mother  
presumption only 10,000 years  
old, amoeba on the same shore  
with humans, dinasours & first U.F.O.

military corporate complex  
will fake it, shake it, take it  
from the veterans  
from the disabled  
the elders, the children  
the working poor, they will  
re-cycle the cannon fodder  
torture offerings forever more?  
these gods of cluster bombs & gore  
to kill workers & the poor?

while peace yet wanders,  
an orphan from door to door  
with no place to rest

we must say no! to war!

support the troops  
bring them home today  
safe & sound that joy  
across our nation  
may abound

# SweatFree Communities press state governors

By Kenneth Miller

Members of the Pittsburgh Anti-Sweatshop Community Alliance (PASCA) went to Philadelphia on July 11-13 to attend the Fifth Annual SweatFree Communities National Conference, which coincided with the national meeting of the National Governor's Association.

Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell reaffirmed his commitment to his 2004 Executive Order prohibiting the state from procuring sweatshop apparel. His Procurement Department personal are continuing to chair a committee of state, city and county governments with similar mandates that are still struggling to implement them effectively. This governmental committee continues to work closely with SweatFree Communities ([www.sweatfree.org](http://www.sweatfree.org)).

Rendell demonstrated his commitment over the weekend by sending a representative from the Department of Labor and Industry to a Workers' Rights Board hearing organized by Philadelphia Jobs with Justice and listening to worker testimony.

## Kansas next to go Sweatfree

PASCA is currently doing outreach to the Governor of Kansas and our friends at the Hope School/Lucinda Todd Academy in Topeka, Kansas. Based on conversations in early July and follow-up since the conference, Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius has said that an Anti-Sweatshop Executive Order is within reach.

PASCA and its "Civil Rights Bridge" partners from the Bias Busters of Kansas are awaiting the announcement and preparing for her presentation at the Lu-

cinda Todd Academy. PASCA is recruiting Pittsburghers to take the bus down for the event in September.

## "SweatFree" Prison Labor Problem

The Fifth Annual SweatFree Communities National Conference examined the question of whether prison labor is SweatFree or not. State and Federal prisons across the country operate sewing shops with prison labor and they are big business for the State. SweatFree Campaigners have allowed numerous pieces of legislation and executive orders to move forward with out campaigning against prison labor exemptions. The SweatFree Governor Rendell PA Executive Order, which UNITE HERE lobbied for in 2004, is one such example.

Knowing that this would be an issue for other state governments with SweatFree procurement policies and that the issue of prison labor was indeed central to the concerns we were trying to address, PASCA has taken no additional actions to address this concern in recent years. In those intermittent years, half a dozen other states have passed SweatFree policies that also exempt prison labor.

Anti-Sweatshop activists from six states attended the workshop. Alisa Kowal, a Smith College alumnus who has been doing research for SweatFree Communities in Western Massachusetts, led the workshop.

In 2006, when members of the Pittsburgh Anti Sweatshop Community Alliance first met with the Deputy Secretary for Procurement to discuss the implementation of the Executive

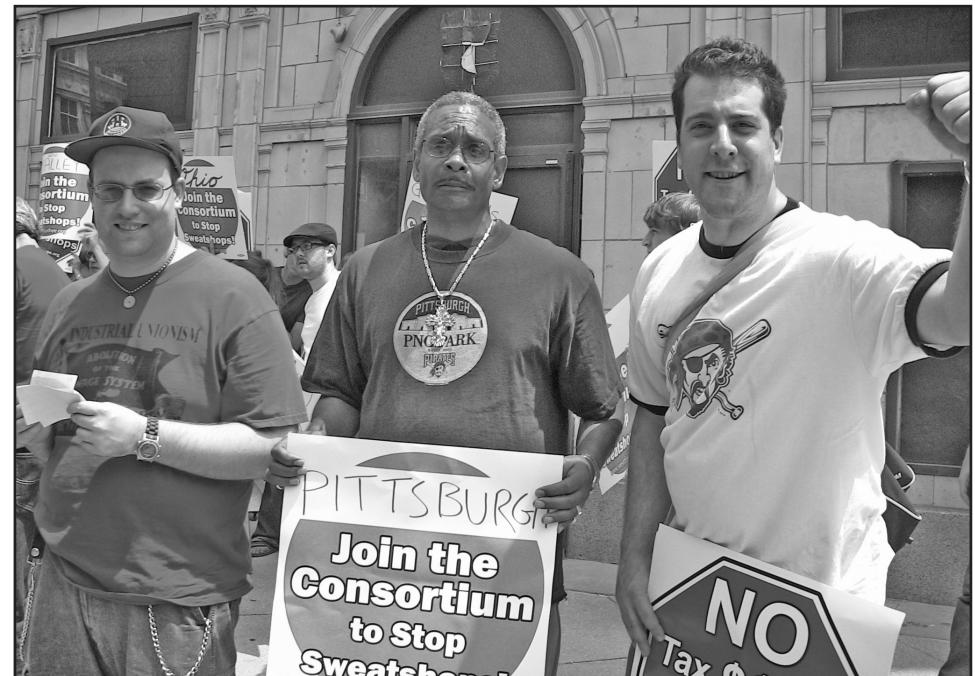


Photo: Mike Pesa

**Left to right: Philadelphia IWW John Kalwaic, Howard Jackson of Pittsburgh's Black Political Empowerment Project, and No Sweatshops Bucco and IWW activist Kenneth Miller.**

Order, discussion of the prison exemption was high up on our list of discussion points. Having done a little research, we asked about it and the response was this: "The apparel manufacturing being done in our prisons is part of the rehabilitation process that prepares inmates for the workforce once they leave prison. The products are not available on the open market, they are sold to local governments and prison systems only. After factoring in the cost of providing security and maintaining the program, the cost is nearly equivalent of what the State could purchase on the open market. We are very proud of our

apparel production programs and maintain a high level of transparency. The exemption of the apparel being made in the prisons from the SweatFree Executive Order is completely appropriate. This is a whole different set of issues than the ones that the SweatFree Executive Order is intended to address."

PASCA is now planning to research this issue using different strategies such as Right to Know Requests and set up a survey to solicit testimony from prisoners directly.

Get involved by contacting either PASCA or the committee chairperson [alisa@sweatfree.org](mailto:alisa@sweatfree.org), 413-387-8492.

## Thai women workers strike back against Triumph's union-busting

By Maquila Solidarity Network, msn.org

On July 30, 2008, a Thai subsidiary of Triumph International, one of the world's largest makers of intimate apparel, fired union president Jitra Kotchadej for wearing an unfashionable t-shirt.

She wasn't wearing the t-shirt at work, and it wasn't the colour or the design of the t-shirt that caused offence.

It was the message on the shirt: "Those who do not stand are not criminals. Thinking differently is not a crime" — a reference to the right of people not to stand when the Thai royal anthem is played and to the abuse of Thailand's *lèse-majesté* legislation to suppress political opposition. At the time, Kotchadej was participating in a late-night television debate on women's reproductive rights.

Despite the fact that she was speaking in her private time and not in her

capacity as a union leader or worker at Triumph's Body Fashion (Thailand) Ltd. Factory, she was fired.

Since then, 3,000 of her co-workers have walked out of the factory in a show of solidarity, demanding the reinstatement of their union president.

Since its inception in 1991, the Triumph Workers' Union has been an important example of successful union organizing in the apparel sector

in Thailand, representing 70 per cent of workers at the company. The majority of members are women.

The union views the dismissal of their president as an attack on the union, which successfully negotiated a collective bargaining agreement this summer.

Support the union's fight for freedom of expression and trade union rights. Write to Triumph today. For more information on how to take action, visit: [www.thailabour.org/tlc08en/](http://www.thailabour.org/tlc08en/).

**Those who do not stand are not criminals. Thinking differently is not a crime.**

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## Laurel immigration raid arrests 595

By Free Speech Radio News [www.fsrn.org](http://www.fsrn.org)

US immigration officials arrested 595 people on August 25 at an electric transformer manufacturing facility in Laurel, Mississippi.

That makes it the single largest workplace raid in US history. The previous record holder was a May 12 raid at a meatpacking plant in Postville, Iowa.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement says that 475 detainees were transferred to a facility in Jena, Louisiana. Another 106 have been released for "humanitarian" reasons, but ordered to wear electronic monitoring devices on their ankles pending an appearance before an immigration judge. Eight of the

nearly 600 arrested have been charged with aggravated identity theft, while 475 are being detained in an immigration camp awaiting deportation hearings. People arrested came from Brazil, El Salvador, Germany, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, and Peru, according to the US Department of Justice.

The company that owns the raided facility, Howard Industries, issued a media statement. "Howard Industries runs every check allowed to ascertain the immigration status of all applicants for jobs," it said. "It is company policy that it hires only US citizens and legal immigrants."

## Turkish trade unionist acquitted after waiting 8 months in jail

By Public Services International

Turkish woman trade union leader Meryem Özsögi has been released from jail with a full acquittal and release after her September 5 trial. She was imprisoned for eight months, since her December 2007 arrest which followed a press conference she gave on behalf of her trade union of public employees in health and social services union, the SES.

She was facing charges on two accounts, the first for "being a member of a terrorist organisation" and the second "for making propaganda in favour of the terrorist organisation". A key issue at stake was the prosecution's contention that her union was a "terrorist" organization.

In a statement issued on September 8 by Public Services International (PSI), Meryem's union "thanked the international community for its support and solidarity via the LabourStart campaign as well as PSI affiliates."

Over ten weeks, 8,586 people sent messages via LabourStart.org to protest her arrest during May Day 2008 protests.

On the first charge the Court ruled that there was insufficient evidence and Meryem Özsögi and other defendants in the case were fully acquitted.

On the second charge, however, the court ruled that Özsögi had indeed been using the Press Conference to "make propaganda in favour of a terrorist organisation" and sentenced her to 15-months of prison—the maximum for this so-called crime. The court agreed to release her as she had already served eight months of her sentence.

Özsögi's lawyer will be appealing to the high court of Yargitay on this second



Photo: Public Services International  
SES union spokesperson Meryem Özsögi was arrested for holding a press conference.

charge. PSI will continue to monitor the situation and support Ms Özsögi's appeal.

In a message to PSI on Ms Özsögi's behalf, SES thanked the international community for its support and solidarity via the Labourstart campaign as well as PSI affiliates, the ILO, the EPSU and ETUC, and the European Union Commissioners.

PSI especially thanks EU Parliamentarian Mr Joost Lagedijk, Chairman of the Turkey delegation to the European Parliament who had personally handed over the campaign signatures to the EU leaders.

*With files from LabourStart.org and the IW.*



# Remembering Helen Keller as a fighter

By Felix Holmgren

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the death of Helen Keller, who had spent her life as a passionate anti-war activist, champion for women's rights and for the physically impaired, anti-racist, and devoted socialist. Most people know her as the deaf-blind and mute Southern girl who learned how to read and write, authored books, and traveled the world as a popular lecturer. In a 1999 Gallup poll, she was named as one of the "most admired persons" of the 20th century.

The story of her childhood years and how she managed to break out of the darkness and silence that had enveloped her does have an undeniable mythical allure. Every new generation has this larger-than-life story fed to them in school as an archetypal example of the heroic triumph of the individual in the midst of adverse circumstances—not without reason.

Keller was born in 1880 into a well-to-do family in Alabama. A bout of meningitis in her second year left her deaf and blind, and, unable to develop any capability to use language, she spent several years in a wordless state, feeling, she later wrote, "as if invisible hands were holding me... without compass or sounding-line," with "no way of knowing how near the harbour was." Her means of communication were limited to nodding or shaking her head and pushing or pulling the people around her. She did have a small repertoire of simple signs to signal basic needs or wishes, but she had no comprehension of them as forming part of a language. By touching other people's faces when they talked, she understood that they somehow were able to communicate by moving their mouths, and she tried in vain to imitate their movements. When these attempts to enter their linguistic circle failed, despair and outbursts of rage followed.

When Keller was six years old, Anne Sullivan was hired as a teacher for the "wild girl." Sullivan was the daughter of dirt-poor Irish immigrants and had herself been almost completely blind as a child. She had managed to become a pupil and later a teacher at a school for the blind, apparently by sheer willpower and inquisitiveness. These were characteristics she shared with Keller, and their encounter would be an explosive one. The two weeks of wordless struggle that preceded the great breakthrough, when Keller realized that "everything has a name," as Sullivan put it, were dramatized by William Gibson in his Fifties play, *The Miracle Worker*, which

inspired a host of sugar-coated TV adaptations.

In a central scene of Penn's 1962 cinema version, Sullivan locks herself in the dining room with Keller, to teach her to eat with a spoon or, rather, to force her. The lesson takes the shape of a purely physical confrontation, where teacher and student, during more than eight minutes (in reality they spent several hours), hit each other, crawl on the floor and smash the furnishing to pieces.

For someone who, by principle, opposes any trace of authoritarianism in education and child rearing, such scenes are disconcerting. Alarming questions pop up: Is learning intimately connected with violence of one sort or another? Wasn't Sullivan's imposed discipline

"I am a child of my generation, and I rejoice that I live in such a splendidly disturbing time."

The sense of intense struggle that dominated Keller's early ears never left her. She grew up, always with Anne Sullivan by her side, surrounded by people who admired and wanted to help her, and she came to view the world as suffused with goodness and beauty.

"Love? Why, bless you, that is easy; it is what everybody feels for everybody else," she reportedly once said at a young age. But early on, she was horrified by the circumstances under which the urban poor were forced to live.

"I have felt their hard, rough hands and realized what an endless struggle their existence must be." She also wrote

**This is not a time of gentleness... It is a time for loud voiced, open speech and fearless thinking... I rejoice that I live in such a splendidly disturbing time.**

—Helen Keller

more loving and considerate than the Kellers' coddling?

Sullivan's mind was set on teaching Keller to spell out words with her fingers, and to realize that these words were the names of things. Obedience, she thought, was a necessary step along the way. "I have thought about it a great deal," she wrote, "and the more I think, the more certain I am that obedience is the gateway through which knowledge, yes, and love, too, enter the mind of the child."

At the same time, Keller worked, from the inside as it were, towards the same goal--communication, but also something more than that: the "light" which language sheds on the world. We have all gone through the linguistic development that for Helen Keller was such a palpable and partially painful experience.

"I never saw such strength and endurance in a child," Anne Sullivan wrote. The fierceness and grit she encountered on the dining room floor never dimmed, but found new means of expression.

"This is not a time of gentleness, of timid beginnings that steal into life with soft apologies and dainty grace. It is a time for loud voiced, open speech and fearless thinking... a time radiant with new ideals, new hopes of true democracy," wrote Keller.

about how blindness was connected to poverty, prostitution, and venereal diseases.

Keller's revulsion toward injustice developed into sympathy with the socialist labor movement. She read Marx and Kautsky and German socialist papers printed in Braille. In 1909 she joined the Socialist party, began writing for several leftist papers, and became a prominent spokeswoman for the movement. The Socialist party was in this period going through an ideological struggle between social democratic and revolutionary camps, and its relationship to the IWW, with which the party shared many members, was ambivalent. Wobblies like Big Bill Haywood regarded the party as a propaganda tool, but denounced all parliamentary activities.

In 1911 a resolution was adopted, banning party members from engaging in direct action and sabotage and

demanding that they support parliamentary elections. Haywood and others were expelled. In a 1913 article titled "A call for harmony", Keller wrote: "What? Are we to put difference of party tactics before the desperate needs of the workers? Are we no better than the capitalist politicians who stand in the high places and harangue about petty matters, while millions of the people are underpaid, underfed, thrown out of work and dying?" The same year, she joined the IWW because, as she said in an interview, the Socialist party was "too slow."

"It is sinking in the political bog. It is almost, if not quite, impossible for the party to keep its revolutionary character so long as it occupies a place under the government and seeks office under it."

In 1912 the Lawrence strike was initiated in Massachusetts. Workers in the textile industry, most of whom were immigrants and women, protested against lowered wages and abysmal working conditions (more than a third of the workers died before the age of twenty-five) and sought help from the IWW to organize a strike. Keller participated actively in the campaign to collect money for the strike. Support for the 50,000 strikers flowed in from all over the country and after a bitter struggle, their demands were met. This was the event that convinced Keller to join the IWW.

"I discovered that the true idea of the IWW is not only to better conditions, to get them for all people, but to get them at once."

Keller had been a famous and widely admired figure, but she faced ridicule by the press, which insinuated that Anne Sullivan was using and manipulating her and, in the words of the *Brooklyn Eagle*, that her "mistakes spring out of the manifest limitations of her development." Keller responded that these writers were "socially deaf and blind."

"It is laudable to give aid to the handicapped—but to advocate that all human beings should have leisure and comfort is a utopian dream, and one who seriously contemplates its realisation must indeed be deaf, dumb and blind!"

## Builders' unions demand democracy in Africa

By Building and Wood Workers' International

More than 130 delegates of the Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI) union held its first Africa and Middle East regional conference in Addis Abbaba, Ethiopia on August 27-28 to focus on building democratic unions and fighting for decent work.

Conference delegates strongly supported the fundamental basic principle of freedom of association and democratic election of governments, condemning the repression suffered by workers and trade union leaders in Mauritius and the Central African Region as well as the absorption of power through undemocratic means in Mauritania and Zimbabwe.

The conference detailed its three-year strategic plan to: 1) Negotiate for sustainable industrial development; 2) Build social dialogue and institutional participation; 3) Demand and protect the right to collective bargaining; 4) Organise and campaign for decent work; and 5) Mainstream gender into the union's demands for decent work and to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination.

"We all know that despite BWI's innovative policies and programmes on promotion of women, our sectors continue to be characterized by gender imbalances and harassment of women workers," said regional BWI Deputy President Stefaan van Thourenhout in a speech.

A key problem for workers in Africa and the Middle East is how globalisation has dramatically reduced the possibili-

ties that most of the youth in the region will get formal jobs. Most youth are largely employed in non-standard work. Delegates resolved that unions must experiment new ways of organising the youth including migrant, casual, subcontracted and informal young workers.

"We all know that millions of workers are losing their jobs due to privatizations, retrenchments, company closures, many have as a result found themselves in temporary, informal, casual and insecure working arrangements, and we all know that workers are working under dangerous, inhumane and degrading conditions in violation of the ILO Core Labour Standards. [...] We cannot solve all problems at once, but we can help each other build our joint strength," said Van Thourenhout.

He also condemned violence in an undemocratic and corrupt Chad that has killed 100 people as well as the situation in Zimbabwe.

"What kind of democracy and fair elections can prevail in a violent environment? We call on all Africa leaders and Nations not to recognise the Government of one party election of Mr. Robert Mugabe," he said.

He also highlighted the "havoc" caused by the HIV/AIDS pandemic for trade union members in the sub-Saharan region and especially to workers in the building industries, due to the mobility of the workers.

With files from the IW.

## International Solidarity Commission

Continued from 12

The police arrested the leaders of the APTUF and CMKP along with eight workers and took them to an undisclosed location. Hours later they were found at the notorious Chaung police Station.

In its letter, the ISC declared its support for the following demand made by the APTUF: 1) Immediate reinstatement for all workers, 2) Release of all arrested workers and leaders, 3) Increase the minimum wage, and 4) Implement and enforce labor laws. The ISC expressed its solidarity with the arrestees and the rest of the Naveena workers and pledged to take whatever further actions are appropriate to see that these injustices are corrected.

### Illegal suspension, firing of Cambodian union leaders

The ISC wrote a letter to the government of Cambodia and several international monitoring organizations expressing alarm at a wave of suspensions and firings of union leaders working at

Seratex Co., Ltd., Eayuan (Cambodia) Garment Co., Ltd., Shoe Premier Factory and Va Prim Factory over the past eight months.

The workers under attack are all leaders of the Free Trade Union of the Kingdom of Cambodia (FTUKC), one of the few independent and democratic labor unions in Southeast Asia. The union leaders were suspended and/or fired without being given any reason. It is clear to the ISC that these discipline actions are acts of retaliation for the workers' union activities and constitute anti-union discrimination in violation of the labor laws of the Kingdom of Cambodia and ILO Conventions 87 and 111. Echoing a formal request to the Ministry of Labor by FTUKC leader Chea Mony, the ISC urged the Government of Cambodia to take prompt action against the law-breaking companies and to order the reinstatement and proper compensation of those union leaders who have been unjustly suspended or fired.

# World Labor Solidarity

A COLUMN BY THE  
INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY COMMISSION

The IWW formed the International Solidarity Commission to help the union build the worker-to-worker solidarity that can lead to effective action against the bosses of the world. To contact the ISC, email [solidarity@iww.org](mailto:solidarity@iww.org).

By Mike Pesa

## Iran sentences teacher to death

The ISC wrote a letter to the government of Iran expressing outrage at the government's recent wave of repression against independent unionists with convictions of activists by its courts. This pattern of arrests and repression clearly shows an intensified offensive against the entire labor movement in Iran.

On July 20, Farzad Kamangar was sentenced to death, nearly two years after being arrested on charges of terrorism, after just a seven minute trial. Kamangar's lawyer heard the charges at the trial itself and had just four minutes to state his defense.

A teacher, Kamangar was brutally tortured during his detention. Iran accused him of collaborating with organizations it considers terrorist, such as the Kurdish Pejak Party, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and for having allegedly transported explosives.

Many individuals and organizations from Iran and abroad have protested his detention and the recent death sentence against him but Iran has disregarded these pleas. To save Kamangar from execution, email the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran [mahmoud.ahmadinejad@president.ir](mailto:mahmoud.ahmadinejad@president.ir) and the Minister of Justice Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi [info@dadgostary-tehran.ir](mailto:info@dadgostary-tehran.ir).

Peaceful May Day demonstrators in Sanandaj were also harshly convicted. Soroush Razani and Shiva Kheirabadi each were sentenced to four months imprisonment and 15 lashes. Abdullah Khani was sentenced to 91 days prison and 40 lashes. Seyed Qaleb Hosseini was sentenced to six months imprisonment and 50 lashes.

Khaled Hosseini, a worker activist, was also sentenced to 91 days suspended jail time and 30 lashes for his efforts to support Mahmoud Salehi, imprisoned at the time. Labor activist Afshin Shams was arrested as well in July 2008. Nine members of the bus union were also dismissed.

Mansour Osanloo, the president of Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, remains in jail since July 2007, serving a five-year jail term for his union activities.

The ISC has called on the government of Iran to unconditionally and immediately release all prisoners of conscious and repeal all charges and sentences against labor activists in Iran. The ISC further demanded the immediate recognition and realization of human rights to all workers in Iran, including the rights to organize freely and to strike.

## ISC European speaking tour hits Germany, Sweden

ISC delegate Stephanie Basile of the New York City IWW branch is spreading the word about the IWW's organizing campaign with underpaid and exploited food warehouse workers. She conducted a seven-city speaking tour through Germany and in Malmö, Sweden, during the European Social Forum.

In September and October, Basile will continue to travel and speak elsewhere in Europe. She is making contacts, exchanging information, and extending greetings to independent labor and working class organizations on behalf of the ISC. For her latest speaking schedule, email [solidarity@iww.org](mailto:solidarity@iww.org).

**Continued on 11**

# French Post targets CNT striker in Marseille

By the International Committee of the Confédération nationale du travail

A mail carrier from Marseille in the Bouches du Rhône region of France is under attack in the wake of the May 2008 postal strike and needs international solidarity, according to the International Committee of the Confédération nationale du travail.

Serge Reynaud was summoned to appear before the central disciplinary commission of the French Post Office in Paris on September 10. His job is on the line.

The postal workers of the Bouches du Rhône region have been at the centre of resistance against being "Mail Carriers of the Future." In October 2006 and March 2007, striking mail carriers forced the Post Office to make concessions.

Between May 14-31, 2008, the Confédération générale du travail (CGT) and Solidaires, Unitaires et Démocratiques (SUD) unions struck against the "Mail Carrier of the Future" project, which involved restructuring the entire mail transport and distribution network in the region. It would include closing sorting centres, regrouping distribution centres, applying new work norms and speed-ups, and making the individual worker responsible for one's own replacements in case of illness. If imple-

mented, 1,000 jobs would be threatened.

Things got tough in 2008 when temporary workers replaced strikers, court officials monitored each strike site, and strikers were classed as Absent Without Leave, among other tactics. After 400 workers struck for 17 days, both workers and management suspended the strike by mutual agreement.

Then, on June 19 fellow worker Serge Renaud was summoned by the bosses. He is accused of having delivered a five minute speech on May 21 and of having been among those who tried to get negotiations going by opening up a boardroom. Management is attempting to tear these normal strike activities out of their context and pursue them as individual disciplinary infractions.

The CNT International Committee is calling for supporters to organize protests at French embassies and consulates or send a message such as this draft statement ("Nous syndicalistes, (name of your organization and country), dénonçons les poursuites à l'encontre de notre camarade Serge de la CNT PTT et facteur à Marseille 01 - Colbert à Marseille. Un coup contre l'un de nous est un coup contre nous tous!") by fax to France Post at 00 33 1 55 44 01 25 or by email to [international@cnt-f.org](mailto:international@cnt-f.org).

# Chinese unions inch toward independence

By John Kalwaic

For the first time since 1949, trade union officials are openly stating that the union should represent the workers and no one else, according to the *China Labour Bulletin*.

"The trade union is a matter for the workers themselves," Chen Weiguang, chairman of the Guangzhou Federation of Trade Unions told a conference on 15 July 2008, adding that the role of enterprise unions must change from "persuading the boss" to "mobilizing the workers."

The government and the ruling Communist Party control China's only labor union, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU). The function of the ACFTU has for the most part been to persuade the boss to behave rather than to organize workers. Now that is slowly starting to change.

The government and its trade unions are becoming increasingly aware that if they do not allow unions to mobilize its workers independently, there could be more riots and violent unrest. China has seen many riots occur against poor pay or unpaid wages, because the government trade unions have been impotent in addressing the workers' demands.

In many Chinese provinces, the government is now allowing the trade unions to mobilize the workers independently. In Shenzhen, a trade union law

was enacted on August 1 which replaced the concept of "collective consultations" by the union with collective bargaining rights. The union's role is to be a "responsible, empowered and battle-ready union" to protect workers' rights, according to Zhang Youquan, head of the Shenzhen Federation's legal department.

Trade union activists have seen the worst excesses of capitalism and economic reform; China is known for both an authoritarian 'one-party' government as well as sweatshops and low pay with little or no workers' rights.

For the last 20 years, China has moved from a planned to a market economy. Although many investors profited off of this reform, most workers have yet to see the benefits.

During the Tiananmen Square protest in 1989 many pro-democracy advocates tried to form independent trade unions; however, the government cracked down upon these independent trade unions along with the rest of the pro-democracy movement. Since then, Chinese labor activists have regrouped and are now attempting to turn the government-controlled ACFTU into a functioning labor union capable of defending workers' rights. However, as it still stands the success of this strategy depends greatly on the mood of the government.

# Swazi unions defy absolute monarch

By John Kalwaic

Protests and strikes have rocked the tiny African kingdom of Swaziland, surrounded by South Africa, one of the world's last absolute monarchies on the occasion of the king's fortieth birthday.

On August 22, 1,500 HIV positive women gathered to protest an expensive European shopping trip by the King's 13 wives. The protesting women claimed that the money would be better spent on treating patients with HIV. Swaziland has the highest HIV/AIDS infection rate in the world, with 38.8 per cent of its 1.2

million people infected and as a result life expectancy for Swazis is 30.

On September 4, workers organized a general strike to protest the King's decadence as well as his absolute rule and corruption in the government. The strike turned violent after police arrested Jan Sithole, general secretary of the Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions. Neighboring South African trade unions are now launching an international solidarity camp with labor unions and pro-democracy activists in Swaziland and Zimbabwe.